

Opening Remarks, James Symons (LBNL)
Symposium on Current Trend in Nuclear Physics
In honor of the 80th Birthday of Wladek Swiatecki.
Saturday, June 17, 2006

I am pleased to welcome you to a symposium honoring Wladek Swiatecki's 80th Birthday, a special day in the life of a remarkable man. Everyone who knows Wladek well, and that includes all of you here, understands that he doesn't waste words and, that he doesn't appreciate those who do! So, I will attempt to keep these opening remarks brief and to the point.

Before saying anything about Wladek, however, let me first thank all of you for coming, especially the speakers and those who have travelled long distances to attend.

Now, let me say something about Wladek, the scientist. There are many ways to skin a cat, and many ways to study theoretical physics. This is especially true in a field like nuclear physics where there are so many technical challenges and so few exact solutions. Many of these approaches are complicated at the start and become more so as time goes on, growing into towers of complexity and detail. Throughout his career, Wladek's approach has been exactly the opposite. He takes simple physical insights and pushes them to the limit. This is a different way of doing physics and it is not for everyone. Among the requirements for this are an enduring fascination with the system, a deep confidence that simple ideas can illuminate the most complex physical situation, plus the patience and concentration to stick with the problem until it is fully worked out, whether this takes five months or five decades.

I hope that this doesn't make Wladek sound like an oddity. The fact is that many of the greatest minds in science have shared the same traits of fascination, patience, endurance and concentration. I am sure that Wladek was born with all of these talents but his training under Peierls in Birmingham, and at the Bohr Institute surely helped also. In today's talks we will hear how the Swiatecki approach has been applied to a number of branches of nuclear physics and has brought illumination to them all.

It is also important to remember that Wladek is not an ivory tower theorist, writing for other theorists. He has always been deeply committed to using theory to advance experimental physics. Several of our speakers today are experimentalists and will speak to this point.

Let me turn now Wladek, the teacher. Wladek hasn't trained an army of graduate students, it's more like a commando, but watch out! In Ray Nix, Bill Myers, Miklos Gyulassy and Joe Kapusta, Wladek has trained some of the best talents in their fields who have taken his methods and had a deep impact in their own careers.

Finally, I would like to address the qualities of Wladek the man. Wladek is soft spoken, but every word counts. He is modest but strong-willed. He is youthful because he couldn't imagine any other way to approach life than with the enthusiasm and curiosity of youth. He has been a sailor, a runner, a carpenter, a devoted family man and many other things as well. He has been an inspiration to his colleagues and friends here at Berkeley Lab for 49 years. He is a treasure for our institution, our division and our field.

This is enough from me. I am delighted to welcome you all here and add my own congratulations to Wladek on his remarkable career.